

Blessed Josemaría's contribution to the Church and the world

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Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was born on January 9, 1902, in a small Spanish city. A true portrait of the richness of his earthly sojourn are his words with which *The Way* opens: "Don't let your life be sterile. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love....And light up all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you carry in your heart."

This man was very much in love with Christ, and true love neither wilts nor dies. Therefore, as we celebrate today the hundredth anniversary of his birth, we are not content to evoke the past. A mere commemoration would clash with the deep humility of Opus Dei's founder. Praise was not for him; he preferred to work hard without calling attention to himself. On the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination, when many considered him a true master of interior life, he said he felt "like a babbling child."

Sometimes he likened himself to an envelope, soon thrown away in the natural eagerness to get to the contents. What mattered was the message, the spirit of sanctifying daily life entrusted to him by God.

The centennial asks us to gaze at the future. It is not nostalgia for the past; it is rather proposal, hope, sincere desire to advance in loving God and neighbor. We have crossed the threshold of a new century. Our day calls for an open mind, eagerness to take on unseen challenges. We are called, as the Holy Father has written in his apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, to "remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence" (no. 1).

Through Opus Dei's founder the church has been given a lasting, energetic message. As we read in the decree whereby the Pope proclaimed

the heroism of Blessed Josemaría's virtues, this message is "destined to last in unchanging fashion, regardless of historical vicissitudes, as an inexhaustible source of spiritual light." As that light deepens our understanding of what Blessed Josemaría taught, we see that no one is excluded from God's call. Likewise we grow in the certainty that, to use one of his images, heaven and earth are joined not only in the distance, on the horizon, but even more in the heart of God's children when they commit themselves to the daring venture of seeking Christ present in earthly realities.

Blessed Josemaría placed himself unstintingly at the service of the mission God gave him. Everything personal in his life was left behind. One could say that he lived only to bring forth and consolidate the institution called to echo that message. It was to remind Christians

living in the world that God calls them *in* and *through* their daily lives. "There is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most common settings, that you are called on to discover," he wrote (*Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, no. 114). He spent himself to serve this ideal, so common yet so great. He led many Christians to discover the supernatural dimension of daily existence. Where others might see but the bottom of a barrel, he pointed out pure gold, emeralds, rubies. Likewise are routine, insignificance, and daily monotony transformed.

His life's richness was born of his dedication to the ecclesial role God assigned to him. This is a constant of the divine logic: it is necessary for us to leave room for God, to be humble. This humility is not a withdrawal, however; rather, it gives everything, down to the last penny. That is why I

want to point out here, especially to myself, that developing all the consequences of Blessed Josemaría's message requires our willingness to commit ourselves as he did.

Now is a good moment to draw on the power entailed in a single idea: that of seeing work as service. "How I like that word: service!" wrote Opus Dei's founder. "To serve my king and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve" (Christ Is Passing By, no. 182). Serving means giving oneself; it manifests an operative love more inclined to deeds than words.

Serving brings in its wake brotherhood, along with such domestic virtues as adorn authentic charity: smiling, patience, divining what pleases others, keeping quiet while hoping for the best. Both trifles and feats make up a spirit of service, in which humility is joined to charity.

There is no place in a Christian's soul for mediocrity, especially when Christ's eloquent example is contemplated. "He has done all things well" (Mk 7:37), said those familiar with him in both his childhood and years of work in Nazareth. To take part in the epic of redemption is no less than to wed the greatest ambition—seeking holiness—with attention to small details.

But service demands the refusal to seek one's self, one's excellence, one's success (Mt 6:24: "No one can serve two masters"). We are to seek only God's glory. But to be useful also calls for growing in professional standing, a respect resting not on appearances but on the ability to address others' real needs. Working to serve both God and neighbor means taking on the duty to give good example with one's work, harnessing personal talents to serve the common good. This cannot be achieved without a

thorough effort to practice virtues on the job. And that means engaging one's professional competence for purposes transcending short-term effects. To work in this way, no little motivation is required: only love for God will last to the end. And so, whoever works to serve, aims beyond personal recognition to discover God's will in the thousand components of daily life. Consequently, when trials and disappointments crop up, serenity is not lost.

Such a desire to serve, therefore, radically alters the hierarchy of values that tend to drive society ("Behold the handmaid of the Lord" Lk 1:38). A Christian thereby reclaims a true sense of reality, since he or she can resonate to true, ultimate ideals ("whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" Mk

10:43-44). Blessed Josemaría's example helps us to find in the Gospel the strength to transform the world, a task incumbent on all Christians. Saints witness to the Gospel's perennial newness. With them we understand that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8).

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